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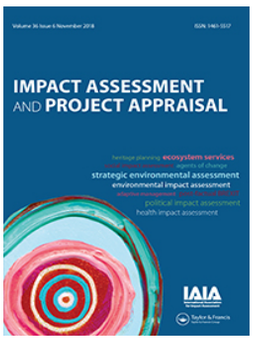

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Social impact assessment in the Russian Federation: does it meet the key values of democracy and civil society?

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary social impact assessment (SIA) is rooted in the concepts of civil society and democracy. We analyse whether SIA as practiced in the Russian Federation as part of environmental impact assessment (EIA) is consistent with the key values of civil society and democracy. We consider whether the Russian EIA requirements enable preparation of meaningful assessments that effectively contribute to the decision-making processes that affect people's lives. We review the Rsussian EIA legislation and its requirements for SIA and social baseline, and consider the EIA/SIA practice undertaken in response to these requirements. We specifically analyse the Karmen coal mining project in South Yakutia. We compare the EIA documents completed according to national requirements against the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) documents prepared to be consistent with international standards, as defined by the International Finance Corporation Performance Standards. We conclude that the national requirements for SIA in Russia and the way they are implemented do not encourage the development of meaningful SIAs that comply with the key concepts and social values of SIA, civil society and democracy.

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Introduction

Although social impact assessment (SIA) was originally conceived as being complementary to the assessment of the environmental impacts of projects (Esteves et al. 2012; Vanclay 2014), contemporary SIA has evolved over time (Howitt 2011; Vanclay and Esteves 2011; Franks and Vanclay 2013; Vanclay 2015). SIA now has an established understanding, including guiding principles and acknowledged values, and is rooted in the concepts of civil society and democracy (Vanclay 2003; Esteves et al. 2012; Vanclay et al. 2015). This understanding provides an effective basis to assess the adequacy of the implementation of SIA in different social contexts. In this paper, we consider the application of SIA in the Russian Federation.

Russia is the largest country in the world in terms of area, and with over 140 million people, it is one of the 10 most populated countries. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Russian Federation developed a new Constitution, which proclaims the inviolability of the democratic basis of Russia (Russian Federation 1993, Introduction). As with many other countries around the world, Russia has implemented national requirements to assess the potential social and environmental impacts of projects and, as a result, an understanding of common practice has evolved around their implementation (Cherp and Golubeva 2004; Solodyankina and Koeppel 2009). In this paper, we assess whether the requirements and practice of impact assessment in Russia are consistent with the basic principles of SIA, civil society and democracy. To do this, we first introduce the concepts of civil society, democracy and SIA. Second, we describe the Russian regulatory framework for impact assessment and compare it to international standards (using the International Finance Corporation Performance Standards as a benchmark). Third, we reflect on SIA practice in the Russian Federation by examining a specific project, the Karmen coal mining project in the Far East of Russia. Finally, we reflect on whether the legislative framework and SIA practice in the Russian Federation are based on and/or consistent with the key principles of SIA, civil society and democracy.

Social impact assessment, civil society and democracy

Even though SIA began as a regulatory tool alongside environmental impact assessment (EIA) (Burdge and Vanclay 1996; Lockie 2001; Esteves et al. 2012), the contemporary understanding of SIA is strongly connected with the concepts of civil society and democracy (Vanclay 2003; Vanclay et al. 2015). However, the precise meaning of these two concepts remains subject to

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much debate. Edwards (2009), for example, suggests that there are three key meanings of 'civil society'. It can be understood as 'associational life', i.e. the totality of voluntary associations and networks, commonly referred to as the third or nonprofit sector. It can also mean 'the good society', i.e. a society that observes the inherent values of freedom and democracy, non-discrimination and non-violence, tolerance and trust. Finally, civil society can mean 'the public sphere', the institutional arena for public deliberation in which people discuss issues democratically in conditions of freedom, equality and non-violent interaction.

The concept of civil society is strongly linked to the notion of democracy (Seligman 1992; Putnam 1993; Ehrenberg 1999). Warren (2011:377) asserted that 'the correlation between robust civil societies and functioning democracies has been so striking that we have to come to understand them as reinforcing one another'. He also argued that the institutions, organisations and practices that comprise democracy should enable those who are potentially affected by collective decisions to have the opportunity to influence those decisions, a position that is widely accepted and is, for example, a fundamental principle of the Aarhus Convention (UNECE 1998). Thus, the understanding of democracy refers to much more than just an election process in which people periodically vote for governments, it refers to all forms of people's participation in decision-making, in other words to governance rather than to government (Kooiman 2003). Civil society and democracy are inherently grassroots concepts—they are fundamentally about the local level, the level of communities and community associations. A key principle of democracy is that decisions should be made by free and equal citizens, respecting the values of trust and mutual understanding (Hartz-Karp and Pope 2011).

SIA shares key values and principles with civil society and democracy (Vanclay 2003; Vanclay et al. 2015). As Vanclay (2003) argued, SIA considers equality to be a key underpinning value; SIA asserts people's right to be involved in the decision-making about the planned interventions that affect their lives; SIA is a grassroots process that draws on local knowledge and experience; and SIA asserts the right of local and affected people to be involved in decision-making processes. Along with civil society and democracy, SIA is inherently participatory (Lockie 2001; Esteves et al. 2012). It acknowledges the right of people to self-determination (Hanna and Vanclay 2013) and builds on certain key principles and values (Vanclay 2003), including respect for human rights (Vanclay 2003; Kemp and Vanclay 2013; Götzmann et al. 2016; Esteves et al. 2017). Vanclay (2012) asserted that the understandings, experiences, philosophy and methods of SIA greatly enhance democratic decision-making and planning processes.

The core values of SIA, civil society and democracy are also embedded in the policies and standards of most international institutions, for example, the World Bank (2017) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD 2014) (Vanclay 2017a, 2017b). The Performance Standards of the International Finance Corporation (IFC 2012a), the private sector arm of the World Bank Group, are considered to have international standing, especially because of their endorsement by the Equator Principles, the sustainability framework for the international banking industry (Smyth and Vanclay 2017; Vanclay 2017a). The IFC Performance Standards cover overarching issues such as gender, stakeholder engagement, SIA and management, as well as certain specific issues like land acquisition, labour and working conditions, Indigenous peoples, cultural heritage, and health and safety. These standards and the way they are implemented provide a good benchmark for determining appropriate requirements and what might be regarded as 'good international industry practice' (GIIP).

This broad perspective of SIA and its association with the concepts of civil society and democracy suggest that it is appropriate to consider how they apply in different social contexts, especially in democratic societies. We, therefore, analyse SIA as it is practiced in the Russian Federation, a country which professes commitment to democratic principles in its Constitution (Russian Federation 1993, Introduction). For the purposes of this paper, we consider that the single overarching key principle is that people should be involved in and able to influence the decision-making processes that affect their lives. For this, principle to be effectively implemented requires at least two things. First, it requires that meaningful SIA be undertaken to analyse how people might be affected by a project (Pisani and Sandham 2006). Second, it requires that there should be effective stakeholder engagement processes to ensure the adequate involvement of potentially impacted people in project development (Pisani and Sandham 2006). This paper focuses primarily on the first of these two issues (SIA), with stakeholder engagement to be addressed in a forthcoming paper.

The regulatory framework for social impact assessment in the Russian Federation

The Constitution of the Russian Federation recognises the principles of equality and self-determination of peoples and asserts the democratic basis of the nation (Russian Federation 1993, Introduction). It confirms people's right to a favourable environment and to reliable information about the state of the environment. It also states that any loss or damage caused to a person's health or property by environmental

transgressions must be compensated (Russian Federation 1993, Article 42). The implication is that this applies to both private and public sector projects.

In line with the Constitution, and building on people's right to a favourable environment, the Russian Federal Law on Environmental Protection requires that an EIA should be conducted to assist decision-making relating to economic activities (Russian Federation 2002, Articles 3 and 32). The contemporary permitting system in Russia requires EIA to be performed as part of the project documentation to be submitted to State Review, which considers administrative compliance, and where the project is likely to have major environmental impacts to State Environmental Review ('State Ecological Expertise'). The State Review process is performed within the framework of the *Urban Development Code* (Russian Federation 2004) and is regulated by the *Order on Organisation and Performance of the State Review of Project Documentation and Results of Baseline Surveys* (Russian Federation 2007). Another government decree specifies the requirements relating to the contents of project documentation, which include a requirement for a special section on 'Environmental Protection Measures'. This section should include the EIA results, as well as relevant mitigation and monitoring measures (Russian Federation 2008, Article 25).

The process of State Environmental Review is within the framework of the Law on Environmental Protection and is regulated by the Federal Law on Environmental Review, which requires an EIA (Russian Federation 1995, Article 14). Over the last decade, Russian legislation has changed with respect to the kinds of projects that should be subject to State Review and/or to State Environmental Review. At present, most projects in Russia are subject to State Review, whereas offshore projects, projects that affect protected natural areas and projects with potentially severe environmental impacts are subject to State Environmental Review. Nevertheless, both review processes are undertaken by government agencies which assesses whether the project documents for a specific project comply with national requirements, and both require preparation of EIA materials.

Russian laws assert people's right to a favourable environment, their participation in decision-making processes and require that impact assessment be conducted for certain types of intended activities (planned interventions). However, the requirements are primarily concerned with environmental issues, and socio-economic issues are only considered in a secondary way. The requirements for consideration of environmental and social issues are established in two key documents: *The Provisions for Environmental Impact Assessment* (Russian Federation 2000) (hereinafter: The Provisions); and *The Code of Practice on Engineering Survey for Construction: Basic Principles* (Russian Federation 2012) (hereinafter: The Code of Practice). The Provisions regulate the overall process of impact assessment. Among other things, the Code of Practice outlines the requirements for conducting a social baseline survey. A baseline survey provides a benchmark against which potential impacts can be anticipated. Since these documents are of critical importance to the SIA process as practiced in Russia, they are discussed below.

The Code of Practice requires that a social baseline survey be conducted as part of an Engineering and Environmental Survey. As evident by this name, this survey is mostly focused on environmental issues, although it should also include socio-economic, sanitary-epidemiological and health surveys (Russian Federation 2012). The type and characteristics of a project and its location will determine whether these studies are required (Article 8.1.2). The surveys need to be reliable and adequate for the subsequent impact assessment (Articles 8.1.1 and 8.4.1). Among other things, the review process determines whether additional research is required (Article 8.1.2). The Code of Practice also details what information the baseline survey should contain, including demographics, employment and standard of living, economics, land ownership and traditional land use, infrastructure, etc. (Article 8.1.2).

In addition to the typical expectations of a baseline survey at an international level (Vanclay et al. 2015), the Code of Practice requires various things relevant to social management, stakeholder engagement and community development, such as a description of proposed measures to enhance people's living conditions, for conducting community engagement, and 'shaping public attitudes towards the project implementation in order to resolve potential conflicts' (Russian Federation 2012, Article 8.4.22).

Although originally adopted in 2000, The Provisions (Russian Federation 2000) have not yet been updated. The Russian EIA process is mostly focused on environmental issues, although it also considers 'social, economic or other impacts that are related to the environmental ones' (Article 1.5). The Provisions do not detail what should be considered as part of these social or economic impacts, although later in the text 'land resources' and 'load on transport infrastructure and other types of infrastructure' are indicated (Article 3.1.1).

The Provisions specify certain requirements regarding the impact assessment process in general. For example, the assessment should be based on complete and valid baseline information (Article 1.5). The level of detail should be appropriate to the scale and type of the intended activity and be specific to the project's area of implementation (Article 5.2). It should be adequate to define and assess the potential project impacts (Article 1.5). The Provisions require that impact mitigation and avoidance measures be implemented (Article 1.1) and that an environmental

monitoring programme be developed as part of the impact assessment process (Article 3.2.2).

Comparing the Russian requirements for social baseline and SIA with international standards as represented by the IFC Performance Standards (IFC 2012a, 2012b), it is evident that they have much in common. For example, the IFC Performance Standards do not provide much detail with respect to what the social baseline survey and SIA should include, just indicating general requirements about the process. The Russian requirements regarding the baseline survey as outlined in The Code of Practice are more specific, although in some cases less consistent. The Russian requirements subordinate social issues to the environmental ones, whereas the IFC considers them on a more-or-less equal basis. Finally, the IFC standards discuss managing social impacts, whereas the Russian requirements focus primarily on the impact assessment process and related compensation.

The Russian requirements have much in common with the IFC standards and potentially could be sufficient to ensure that meaningful SIA is performed. Its key weakness is the subordination of social issues with respect to environmental ones. Such an approach is conceptually flawed (Pisani and Sandham 2006) and could lead to key social issues being easily missed or under-addressed in the assessment process (Vanclay 2012; Vanclay et al. 2015). However, no matter how detailed the written requirements may or may not be, and no matter how consistent or inconsistent they are, arguably more important is the way they are implemented in practice, which we consider by examining a specific coal mining project in Russia.

Methodology

To review the practice of SIA in Russia, we consider the Karmen coal mining project in the Russian Far East. This is an operation valued at approximately US $2.5 billion. We analyse the SIAs conducted as part of larger Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIA) for the project, which were done twice: one according to Russian requirements to gain environmental permitting approval (hereinafter the national EIA); and another to international requirements to gain financing from an international bank (hereinafter the international ESIA).

The lead author of this paper, a native Russian, works as a social consultant in Russia and was a member of Branan Environment, the lead consultancy firm responsible for the international ESIA for the Karmen project, although the SIA component was developed in collaboration with an independent social consultant, Frederic Giovannetti. Work on the ESIA commenced in 2013 and was completed in 2014. This paper is partly a critical reflection on how the social component of ESIA was done. The Karmen coal mining project is used in this paper as an illustrative case to enable comparison between Russian and international requirements. The paper also draws on the professional experience of the lead author and the experience of Branan Environment more generally.

The international ESIA for the Karmen coal mine comprised an initial scoping report and the final ESIA report. Both stages included consultations with project stakeholders. The key sources of information for the SIA included the relevant branch of the Federal State Statistics Service, information and documents provided by local and district authorities, and interviews with their representatives. To collect information on the activities of Indigenous peoples in the project area, a focus group with the leaders of the local Indigenous communities and local organisations was conducted. Also, an in-depth interview with the district Hunting Inspector was conducted. Key company staff were also interviewed. A total of 17 in-person interviews were undertaken. Data collection was supplemented by three site visits undertaken in 2013 and 2014 to gain an overview of the potentially affected communities and to validate the data. All interviews were done in a manner consistent with ethical social research in impact assessment (Vanclay et al. 2013).

The international ESIA, which was undertaken to be consistent with IFC Performance Standards, is used as the benchmark against which the national EIA was assessed. By assessing the differences between the national EIA and the international ESIA, it was possible to identify the shortfalls in the Russian EIA process.

The Karmen coal mining project

The Karmen Coal Mining Project comprises the Denisovsky and Chulmakansky coalfields in Eastern Siberia, Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), in the Russian Federation (see Figures 1 and 2). The mineable reserves of these two coalfields together are over one billion tonnes. The project is being implemented and operated by the Kolmar Coal Mining Company (http://www.kolmar.ru/en/), whose goal is to achieve a leading position in the coking coal market based on the large deposits of South Yakutia and their strategic proximity to Asian markets. To achieve that, the company has planned to develop several sites (both greenfield and brownfield) within the two coalfields. The ESIA was based on Kolmar's plans to achieve a total production of 12.9 million tonnes per annum by 2021. However, in 2017, the company announced that it intended to increase the project's expected capacity to 20 million tonnes per annum. The developments include four underground mines, three open-cast

Figure 1. Location of the Karmen Coal Mining Project within the Russian Federation.
Source: Project Karmen. Environmental and Social Impact Assessment, 2014.

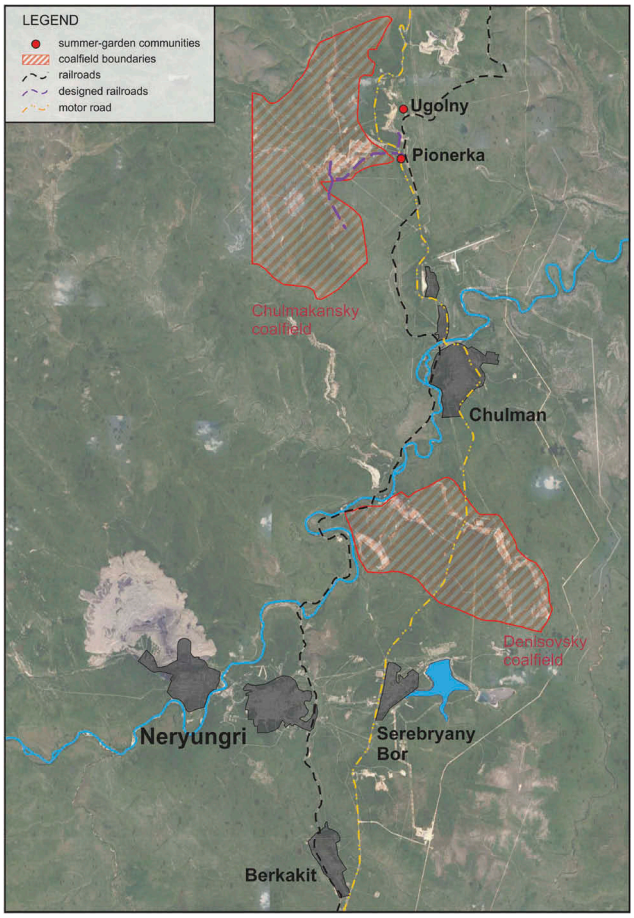

Figure 2. Layout of the Karmen Coal Mining Project.
Source: Project Karmen. Environmental and Social Impact Assessment, 2014.

mines, two coal preparation plants, and associated infrastructure facilities. The Russian Government supports the project and finances part of the project infrastructure—specifically the access railway and powerline (approximately 7 km each). The different project components will progressively come into operation, with the mine slated to operate until around 2080. At the time the ESIA was prepared, it was considered that the project would employ 3,500 people when operating at full capacity (in about 2021). However, after the project increased its capacity, the anticipated number of employees is now around 7,000 people. Because the focus in our paper is the ESIA process in the Russian Federation rather than on the specifics of this case, we discuss the project as it was described in the ESIA materials.

Overview of the EIA done to national requirements

Consistent with the Russian requirements, separate EIAs were conducted for each project facility associated with the Karmen coal mining project. The documents available for our review were developed by two Russian companies during 2007–2008 (Ecoproekt 2007; Sibgiproshakht 2008a, 2008b, 2008c). These documents contained only very limited socio-economic information. They provided distances to the closest communities, and sometimes distances to the main public road, railway line and powerline in the district. They listed the businesses in the vicinity of project facilities. The EIA materials described land ownership and acquisition issues, as well as the proposed compensation measures for landowners. The EIAs for some facilities considered impacts on nearby communities associated with air emissions and noise. Some EIA materials also identified the positive impact on employment by the creation of jobs. However, the materials did not contain information about the project area of influence, or analysis of the communities potentially affected by the project. The socio-economic baseline information that was provided was insufficient to identify the potential social impacts of the project. No social impacts, except those associated with air and noise emissions, were identified or mitigated. Therefore, the results of SIAs undertaken as part of the national EIA process could be considered as being insufficient for assessing and addressing social impacts. Although no major social impacts were anticipated to arise from the project, these SIA reports are too inadequate to provide appropriate information to contribute to meaningful decision-making regarding project design and implementation.

Overview of the ESIA done to international standards

Kolmar intended to obtain funding from international financial institutions and, therefore, commissioned an ESIA that would meet IFC requirements. It contracted the Russian consulting company, Branan Environment, in collaboration with an international consultant, Frederic Giovannetti, with the ESIA being compiled during 2013–2014. Drawing on the ESIA (Branan Environment 2014), below we describe the key characteristics of the project area and the main potential social impacts of the project as identified in the ESIA undertaken according to international requirements. Compared with the study undertaken to national requirements (as described above), the ESIA prepared to be consistent with international standards provided much more information, which we consider below according to typical key topics in an ESIA.

Project area of influence

The project is in the Neryungri District of Yakutia. The majority of this district is undeveloped and covered by Siberian taiga. Climatic conditions are severe with short summers and long winters. The history of the non-Indigenous communities in the area only goes back to the period between the 1950s and 1970s, when the then Soviet government decided on a programme of industrial development involving the coal industry, metallurgy and railroad construction. Today, nearly 80,000 people live in the district, mostly residing in the city of Neryungri (60,500 people) and in nine smaller communities. The project area of influence includes four communities: Neryungri, Chulman, Serebryany Bor and Berkakit. The first three were included because they are the closest communities to the project area and because a sizeable number of the project workers will be accommodated there. Berkakit was included as project-affected community because it has a railway junction that will experience increased rail traffic because of the project. The project facilities are located between 7 and 34 km from residential areas.

Neryungri is the district centre and houses most of the workforce and social infrastructure (see Figure 3). Serebryany Bor (population 4,200) has developed around the district power station (see Figure 4); while Berkakit (population 4,100) has developed around the railway and railway station. Chulman (population 9,800) was founded in 1926 as a checkpoint to enable authorities to control gold smuggling. Its subsequent development is associated with the industrial development of the area. Some members of this community assist in the maintenance and operations of the local airport. In 1948, a forced labour camp (gulag) was established in Chulman. Its prisoners participated in the construction of the community and industrial development of the local area.

Figure 3. Street with Residential Houses in Neryungri.
Source: Project Karmen. Environmental and Social Impact Assessment, 2014.

Figure 4. Serebryany Bor and power station in the background.

Source: Project Karmen. Environmental and Social Impact Assessment, 2014.

Figure 5. Summer House in Pionerka.

Source: Project Karmen. Environmental and Social Impact Assessment, 2014.

There are also two summer-garden communities, Ugolny and Pionerka, located approximately 1 km and 3 km from the company's license areas (see Figure 5). Comprising some 20 to 40 garden plots (sometimes with summer houses), they do not have official status as a settlement, nevertheless they are important to local people. Pionerka and a cemetery are located less than 500 m from the railway and powerline.

Demographic impacts

The Neryungri District has been facing a steady decline in population in recent decades due to the out-migration of people. Between 2007 and 2012, more than 20,000 people have left the district. During Soviet times, people went to explore the North and other remote regions for the so-called 'big money', with wages in these regions being several times higher than in other parts of the country. Many people came to Neryungri District with the goal of making a lot of money in a short time and with the intention of returning to their original place of living. However, after obtaining housing and permanent jobs, many chose to remain living in the district.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the shift towards a market economy, payment of high wages in these regions ceased. In the absence of high salaries, given the harsh climatic conditions and general stagnation of the area, many people decided to leave. A large portion of the out-migrants were pensioners, former employees who wanted to return to their original homes. Young people, particularly those with a high level of education, also tended to leave. Despite the general tendency for out-migration and population decline, some people still move to the district, typically coal industry workers and their families. In the period of 2007–2012, about 13,200 in-migrants arrived in the district.

The Karmen project is associated with the creation of a significant number of jobs, with 3,500 intended jobs at the time the ESIA was conducted (although in 2017 this was increased to 7,000). The provision of direct and indirect employment will contribute to reducing unemployment in the local population and to reducing the out-migration of youth, which is a major issue.

Economic impacts

The economy of the Neryungri District directly depends on coal mining and the dominant industry greatly influences all other economic activities in the region. According to official statistics, around 25% of workers in the district are in the coal mining industry. As in many locations around the world, especially areas that are remote, mining may be the only development option for the region (Esteves and Vanclay 2009). The main enterprises of the district reflect this dependence with the two large coal-mining companies (including Kolmar) being the major employers in the district. Other economic activities are mainly focused on providing services to the coal industry and/or to the local population. The domination of coal mining in the district structures the job market – e.g. there is high demand for technical mining specialists and little demand for non-mining-related professions.

The main other employers in the surrounding communities reflect the legacy of Soviet times. For example, in Berkakit the main employer is the railway station, with Berkakit being the focal point for coal transportation in the district. Serebryany Bor has a power station that supplies electricity to local communities and industries. As the community furthest from the mine, Chulman has the highest unemployment rate among the project-affected communities.

The proposed project will likely positively affect the local economy, especially if the negative impacts are properly managed. The positive impacts are primarily associated with local employment and procurement, as well as the taxes paid by the company.

Impacts on social infrastructure and housing

The houses and social infrastructure in Neryungri, as well as in other project-affected communities, were mainly built in the 1970s and 1980s, during the period of active development. There are concrete (masonry) and wooden houses in the district (see Figures 6 and 7), with the proportions of each depending on the particular community. Wooden houses tend to be two-storey buildings on piles/stumps that were meant to be temporary housing for workers. Housing of this type is typical for mining settlements in Siberia. At present, almost all wooden houses in Neryungri District are in disrepair, although a significant number of people still live in them. The proportion of substandard housing in the communities varies from 9% to 80% and is directly proportional to the proportion of wooden houses in each community.

The educational and healthcare institutions in the communities were mainly built in the 1970s and 1980s. At present, most of them require minor if not major repair. Our observations revealed some to be in very poor condition. Many kindergartens were overcrowded, with the number of children vastly exceeding the intended capacity. A lack of medical personnel was also an issue for the healthcare institutions in the district.

The implementation of the project and the expected associated influx of job-seekers have the potential to put strain on existing social infrastructure, which will be exacerbated by the fact that much of this infrastructure is in poor condition and is already overloaded. In planning accommodation for its workers, the company will need to consider the limited availability of housing.

Traffic impacts

Various impacts are associated with project traffic. All project-affected communities are distributed along the one primary road and railway line that cross the district from North to South. These are the only transport arteries in the district, and they will be heavily utilised by the project. Therefore, there will be risks to community safety associated with the movement of heavy machinery and the project's light vehicles on public roads. Severance of land and disturbance and annoyance to communities may also occur when roads have to be closed for project construction.

Indigenous peoples

About half of the Neryungri District is subdivided into territories allocated to Indigenous peoples, while other territories are hunting areas or protected areas (nature reserves) used by the Indigenous peoples, the Evenks. During Soviet times, many Indigenous people assisted in the industrial development of the area by working as guides, in mapping the region, and in a range of other activities, so today many Indigenous peoples are fully assimilated into mainstream life and reside in Neryungri and other communities, rather than subsist on reindeer herding or other traditional livelihood activities. However, some Indigenous peoples still do maintain traditional ways of life, with reindeer herding and hunting as key activities. Some project license areas are within public hunting areas and partly within the hunting area of a private company. The company's licence plots do not directly affect the territories allocated to Indigenous peoples. However, several hunters from one Indigenous organisation do hunt in the public hunting areas not far from the company's south coalfield. Another Indigenous community is likely to hunt near the company's north coalfield. Thus, the project is associated with potential impacts on land with related impacts on the livelihoods of these Indigenous groups, although the extent of these impacts is likely to be limited.

Figures 6 and 7. Concrete and Wooden Houses in Neryungri.
Source: Project Karmen. Environmental and Social Impact Assessment, 2014.

Other impacts

The settlements of Ugolny and Pionerka are located close to the project footprint. The cemetery of Pionerka is likely to be affected by project facilities. Relocating a cemetery is a difficult task from a permitting perspective and is potentially traumatic to the communities and individuals involved. The company has indicated that it will seek to avoid negative impacts on these settlements and the cemetery and will attempt to locate project facilities at a reasonable distance, even if this requires a change to the design of its facilities.

The experience of similar projects in the Russian Federation indicates that there is a risk to a company and its workers if labour and health and safety issues are not properly addressed. This is especially relevant given to the high number of project workers who could potentially be engaged by the many contractors. Health and safety risks are also relevant with respect to workers accommodation, especially given the lack of adequate housing in the district.

Stakeholder engagement

Two rounds of consultations were organised as part of the SIA process for the Karmen project. Public meetings were held in each community following disclosure of project information in each affected community. Even though several notification methods were employed to inform local residents and stakeholders, they showed only limited interest in the project and its potential impacts. No comments were received via the comment spaces, and the public meetings had only a very low attendance. There are several reasons for this including that: it was already a mining area and there was tacit support for the project; the project was generally seen as having little impact and it was not critical for people to participate; there was not a strong culture of participation in the region; and perhaps the overall socio-economic stagnation of the area negatively influenced people. As noted earlier in the paper, the analysis of the stakeholder engagement issues in Russia will be considered further in a separate paper.

Evaluating the Russian requirements by comparing the national EIA with the international ESIA

By comparing the national EIA undertaken for the Karmen project according to Russian requirements against the International ESIA prepared according to IFC requirements, we conclude that national EIA studies are likely to be inadequate in that they lack details of the local social context. This was true not only for the Karmen project we considered, but according to our knowledge of project documentation for other Russian projects, this was true of most projects in Russia. Social information is either entirely absent or only provided in the form of high-level statistical data with questionable relevance to the proposed project and its likely area of influence. Information directly about the potentially affected local communities was either entirely or largely lacking, even though this should be the focus of SIA (Vanclay et al. 2015). On the other hand, the international ESIA done for the Karmen proved that adequate social baseline information is obtainable in the Russian context and that quality SIAs can be conducted to meet or exceed international standards.

Baseline information is usually available at the Federal Statistics Service and its regional branches, at various district and local authorities, and at relevant agencies for specific issues, e.g. hunting and Indigenous peoples. Our experience reveals that there is often limited socio-economic information at the community level, although this deficiency can be addressed by the qualitative information provided by local authorities and other local stakeholders.

The limited social baseline information that is typically included in national EIA reports is not adequate for identifying project social impacts. For example, the national SIA conducted for the Karmen project failed to identify the presence of Indigenous peoples and hunters in the area, did not indicate that there would be potential impacts on the non-official summer-garden communities in the proximity of project facilities and did not consider the existence of a nearby cemetery and the implications that locating project infrastructure near the cemetery might cause. The issue of increased demand (strain) on district social infrastructure was also not considered in the Russian SIA.

Experience suggests that, in Russia (and elsewhere), the limited social baseline data are often the only social information included in project EIA documentation. This means that SIAs developed to meet national requirements fail to consider most social impacts. Only very limited project social impacts tend to be identified, for example, those associated with transport issues. Many other likely project impacts are not identified and, therefore, are not mitigated or managed. Even though there are EIAs for some projects in Russia that identify certain social impacts and may even propose mitigation measures for these social impacts, the proposed mitigation measures often do not relate directly to the identified social impacts. In other words, the links between the social baseline, social impacts, social mitigation and management measures are missing. Even in situations where a company conducts SIA according to the IFC requirements and develops ESIA materials where social impacts are properly addressed, this information is typically not submitted to State Review as part of the national

study. Instead, to be approved at the national level, projects tend to only submit the documents necessary to meet the minimal requirements and expectations of the review process.

The impact assessment process in Russia tends to focus only on environmental impacts. Our experience reveals that any SIAs done are typically managed by the environmental specialists within the companies. These specialists usually have a lot of environmental issues to be concerned with and therefore they do not pay much attention to social issues.

The social baseline information that is usually provided in project documentation developed according to the Russian requirements is not sufficient to identify potential project social impacts. The results of the impact assessment process conducted according to national requirements are usually weak. They do not ensure that the potential impacts on the communities are identified and addressed, and do not contribute to meaningful decision-making processes. Even if a company takes the initiative to develop an international ESIA and address social impacts properly, this is not reflected in the national EIA materials for the project.

Conclusion

As with many other countries (Ahmadvand et al. 2009; Hanna et al. 2014; Hansen et al. 2016), the EIA process in the Russian Federation does not adequately address social issues. Even though the Russian national requirements have much in common with international standards, they do not ensure that meaningful and useful SIA is undertaken. Similar to the issues identified elsewhere by others previously (e.g. Burdge and Vanclay 1996; Vanclay 2004), the key weaknesses of the Russian national EIA process with respect to social issues are as follows:

- social impacts are regarded as being subordinate to environmental impacts;
- there is an expectation that only high-level social baseline data are required, and therefore only limited information regarding the potentially affected communities and stakeholders tends to be provided;
- few (if any) social impacts are properly considered;
- the links between the social baseline, social impacts, social mitigation and the management of the project are not identified;
- the review process has minimal requirements and expectations, and does not appreciate any additional effort or extra documentation; and
- there is a lack of capacity within companies to terms of social expertise to address the social impacts of projects.

In this paper, we considered the overarching key principle of SIA, civil society and democracy—that people should be involved in and able to influence the decision-making processes that affect their lives—and the extent to which it was served by the Russian EIA procedures. For this principle to be effectively implemented requires two things: that meaningful SIA be undertaken; and that there be a proper decision-making process that allows discussion of the SIA results with the affected people. It is difficult to establish which of these two things is more important, however, without a meaningful SIA process, the decision-making process has little information to consider.

The weaknesses of the national EIA process are such that they do not lead to project developers performing an adequate SIA that enables the social impacts to be fully identified and properly managed. A limited assessment cannot contribute to meaningful decision-making processes, or to ensuring good outcomes for those who are potentially affected by or interested in a project. Potentially affected people and other stakeholders do not have appropriate information about potential disturbance, benefits or the social changes that will be brought about by a proposed project. Therefore, discussion of the pros and cons of a project is difficult. This means that the SIA process, as undertaken according to the national requirements in Russia, is not consistent with the international principles of SIA, civil society and democracy.

We agree with Esteves et al. (2012) that regulators can assist by better formulation of the terms of reference for SIA studies. There are a number of ways by which this could be achieved. First, there should be a requirement to consider social impacts more generally, rather than only those social issues associated with biophysical environmental impacts. In other words, there should be a shift in the focus of the assessment process from 'environmental impacts' to 'environmental and social impacts'. Second, the national requirements should be more stringent in relation to the identification and management of social impacts. In particular, the links among social baseline, social impacts, social mitigation and management should be clearly spelled out. Finally, the practice of SIA in Russia needs significant improvement. We believe that this is primarily the task of the project documentation reviewers. No matter how good the companies are, they usually do not make adequate effort or spend resources on things they consider are not required. The reviewers should be more demanding in respect to the social aspects of the projects they review and they should reject the documents when they are inadequate.

The experience with the Karmen project shows that it is possible to conduct proper SIA in Russia, and to an international standard. There are adequate sources of data available to enable social baselines to be compiled. Thus, there is an

opportunity to improve the SIA practice in Russia to enable meaningful results that can ensure the potentially affected people are involved in and can influence the decision-making processes relating to projects that affect their lives.

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Disclosure statement

At the time of the research, the lead author was employed by Branan Environment, which did the consultancy work for the international ESIA reported in this paper.

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